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Viewing cable 05PORTAUPRINCE776, LAVALAS TORN BETWEEN BOYCOTTING ELECTIONS AND

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05PORTAUPRINCE776	2005-03-22 19:42	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Port Au Prince

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-1/Campagne%20des%20E.U..asp>
<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-2/WikiLeaked%20Cables%20Reveal%20Obsessive.asp>
<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-2/Campagne%20des%20E.U..asp>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PORT AU PRINCE 000776

SIPDIS

SOUTHCOR ALSO FOR POLAD
WHA ALSO FOR USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: LAVALAS TORN BETWEEN BOYCOTTING ELECTIONS AND
MOVING FORWARD

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary: The Lavalas movement remains divided between leaders who argue for moving beyond Aristide and participating in elections this fall, and those who continue to call for Aristide's return and threaten a boycott of elections if their hard-line conditions are not met. The division is not clear-cut. There are indications that some of the principal hard-liners are in fact interested in participating in elections; this is especially true of Father Gerard Jean-Juste, who has emerged as a hard-line leader. A group of Lavalas moderates around former PM Cherestal continues to lay the groundwork for a new party that would attempt to capture the Lavalas vote, but some of them still hope to unite both factions under one umbrella. The many U.S.-based Lavalas members and "solidarity" activists complicate the picture; they are pushing a tough boycott position, but their distance from the process on the ground is likely to limit their influence. Aristide's shadow continues to hang over the movement, with most people defining their positions in relation to him and many trying to use his name to rally for their position. We anticipate it will not be clear for several more months how and whether the Lavalas movement -- either as Fanmi Lavalas or another party, or both -- will be represented in the elections. End summary.

2. (C) In the wake of Aristide's departure, the movement and party he led are still trying to figure out their future. The internal debates and public arguments have now begun to

focus on the concrete question of whether Lavalas should participate in this fall's elections or boycott them entirely. The degree to which the Lavalas constituency participates in the election will be a large factor in the legitimacy of the elections, and we are therefore following developments inside the movement closely. Over the past three weeks, we have spoken with a number of contacts -- Lavalas leaders, politicians from other parties, local analysts, U.S.-based activists, and others -- to put together a picture of the movement seven months ahead of the first (local) elections.

Elections yes, elections no

13. (C) The two main factions inside Lavalas can be outlined fairly simply. Broadly speaking, hard-liners reject the legitimacy of the IGOH and electoral process and insist that elections cannot take place until Aristide is returned to power. They focus on Fanmi Lavalas (FL) the registered political party and insist that only FL represents the legitimate Lavalas voice. Father Gerard Jean-Juste, a longtime Lavalas activist and priest, has emerged in recent weeks as the most significant hard-line leader (spurred by his imprisonment last fall and his visit earlier this year to Aristide in South Africa). He outlined his position at a March 5-6 conference of Haitian political parties (reftel): FL would boycott elections unless Aristide is returned to power, political prisoners are released, "persecution" of Lavalas partisans stops, and several other conditions are fulfilled. He reiterated these in a March 10 conversation with PolCounselor, arguing that it was not only illegitimate to participate in elections, it was also impossible, since FL members could not meet or campaign safely. The hard-line position is shared, at least publicly, by the leadership of the National Reflection Cell of Lavalas Popular Organizations, by pro-Aristide activists in Bel-Air and other neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, and by pro-Aristide activists in other parts of Haiti (e.g. Milot mayor Jean-Charles Moise). Some of these people are suspected of being involved in the pro-Aristide violence that has occurred in the capital since last fall.

14. (C) Those in the moderate faction, more diverse and less vocal, insist they want to participate in the elections, that they represent the original spirit of the Lavalas movement, and that FL itself has been discredited by Aristide and his misgovernance. The most significant group is coalescing around former Prime Minister Jean-Marie Cherestal, who has been quietly and cautiously preparing the groundwork to launch a new "Lavalas Renewed" party (ref B). Cherestal told PolCounselor March 13 that he was satisfied with his progress in building support and said he was not worried that elections were only seven months away. The party's basic message to Haiti's poor majority would be that Aristide's power had been a deceit; he was able to speak their language and raise their expectations, but he had not been able to deliver any true benefits to them. Initial reactions to the draft Lavalas Renewed manifest had been positive, and Cherestal said he would soon "widen the circle" to bring more in, including former Lavalas Senators and Deputies like Gerald Gilles, Yvon Feuille, Rudy Heriveaux and others. He said he was still hesitant about some of these since he was not convinced they had fully distanced themselves from Aristide, but he knew it was important to bring them in if possible.

15. (C) For their part, Feuille, Gilles, Heriveaux, and former Chamber of Deputies President Yves Cristallin told us March 17 that they were still uncertain whether a new party was the right direction. Feuille was the most convinced, saying he was committed to working with Cherestal, but he noted that financial resources were extremely limited for building a new party (a complaint not shared by Cherestal). Gilles and Heriveaux said they worried about violent reactions from Aristide supporters, and also about the lack of funds. All noted with some pain that Cherestal had not kept them very well informed about his activities.

Hidden agendas make clarity difficult

16. (C) This being Haiti, the division between hard-liners and moderates is not precise. In a political culture where hidden agendas are the norm, several appear to be at work inside the Lavalas movement; the most important of these may be Jean-Juste's. Despite his hard-line rhetoric, nearly everyone we speak with is convinced that Jean-Juste in fact wants to participate in the elections and sees himself as a strong Presidential candidate. MIDH President Marc Bazin told us he came away from an early March meeting with Jean-Juste convinced the priest was waiting until closer to the elections to declare his candidacy. Voltaire, who has met frequently with Jean-Juste, also told us he believes Jean-Juste is interested in running for President or, failing that, in playing a power-broker role.

17. (C) Whether all the "moderates" are really committed to participating in elections is another question. Cherestal's suspicion of Gilles and Heriveaux is not without reason; both have acknowledged publicly and privately their continuing attachment to Aristide even as they portray themselves as ready to move on, and Heriveaux told us he would rather campaign with FL than with anybody else, even if Jean-Juste were the standard-bearer. Voltaire says he supports Cherestal, but he also describes himself as working to avoid a split in the movement over elections and to bring the two factions together. Many in the movement see this as fence-straddling and dismiss him as an opportunist who has managed to hold Ministerial positions nearly uninterruptedly since 1990. (Note: We understand that Voltaire, an architect by profession, has been considering an offer to oversee the construction of the new airport in Caracas, Venezuela. End note). Another professed moderate (and would-be presidential candidate), Jean-Claude Desgranges, was Aristide's last chief of staff and is married to a reportedly hard-line pro-Aristide FL activist who resides in Florida; Cherestal, among others, questions his "moderate" credentials.

Electoral strategies for the post-Aristide era

18. (C) For most of the 1990's, the Lavalas movement represented the (poor) majority of Haitian voters, and Lavalas/FL could run on its own. Defections from the movement and disillusionment with Aristide's record have diminished the electoral appeal of Fanmi Lavalas, but to a degree that is unclear. Polling data from August 2004 showed that 8% of Haitians support FL, more than any other single party but a far cry from the 20-40% (or even 80%) that many Lavalas politicians insist the party enjoyed. (That same poll, however, showed that Aristide was still the only figure in Haiti with a favorability rating above 50%.) Thus it is not surprising that all of our contacts acknowledge the need for electoral alliances.

19. (C) Marc Bazin's MIDH party is most often cited as a likely partner. Voltaire called Bazin "one of Haiti's most modern politicians" and said MIDH would give Lavalas technical credibility that it currently lacked. Cherestal, too, said he hoped Bazin would join forces with his new party, but worried that he would make common cause with the hard-line faction instead. Even Jean-Juste said that Bazin had become very popular within the Lavalas base because of his insistence on true reconciliation and his criticism of the IGOH's perceived harsh approach to Lavalas. Bazin himself told PolCounselor in early March that he was very interested in an alliance with Jean-Juste because of the support it would bring him from the Lavalas base. He dismissed the possibility of an alliance with Cherestal's party-in-formation, calling it "dead in the water." (Note: Bazin frankly acknowledged to the Ambassador that he hopes to capitalize on the exclusion of Lavalas, especially the moderates. He would be highly unlikely to step aside in favor of a Lavalas candidate. End note.) Both MODEREH, the party of former Lavalas Senators Dany Toussaint and Pierre Sonson Prince, and KOMBA, the movement of former Lavalas official Evans Lescouflair and peasant leader Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, would appear to be potential allies of either FL or a Cherestal-led moderate Lavalas party. Each has baggage though: Dany Toussaint is clouded by drug trafficking allegations and Chavannes Jean-Baptiste is seen by many hard-liners as a traitor to Lavalas.

The U.S. faction

110. (C) In addition to the hard-line and moderate Lavalas factions here in Haiti, there is in effect a third "faction" with agendas and influence that play a significant role: the U.S.-based community of staunchly pro-Aristide FL members-in-exile and "solidarity" activists. The former are grouped together in the "FL Communications Commission" (www.hayti.net) that asserts the exclusive right to speak on behalf of the party. Members include former FL interim chairman Jonas Petit, former Interior Ministry Angelot Bell, former government spokesman Mario Dupuy, former Aristide advisor Maryse Narcisse, and former deputy Gilvert Angervil (Yvon Feuille and Rudy Heriveaux are also members, but have effectively been ostracized by the others). The solidarity activists come from a wide variety of organizations, many of them with connections to the former Aristide government. Many are grouped under the Let Haiti Live coalition (www.1ethaitilive.org) and have been sharply critical of the IGOH and U.S. policy in Haiti. We believe that some of them are in regular contact with Aristide.

111. (C) According to a well-placed contact inside this group, there are regular consultations among key leaders of both groups, leading hard-line figures in Haiti, including Jean-Juste and OP leaders such as Lesly Farreau and Lesly

Gustave, and members of Aristide's entourage in South Africa. According to this same contact, the U.S.-based members recently "decided" that Lavalas should boycott the elections this fall and should be prepared for a long-term campaign to destabilize and delegitimize the IGOH and the government installed next February. This group's distance from the process on the ground, however, constricts its influence. We have seen clear indications, for example, that Jean-Juste has refused to accept this "decision" and has insisted that decisions be made by the people on the ground. Nonetheless, the U.S.-based activists will play an important role in determining how and whether Lavalas participates in the elections.

The Aristide Shadow

12. (C) Hanging over all of this is the shadow of Aristide, who remains popular among much of the Lavalas popular base and remains the legal head of the Fanmi Lavalas party. Many see Jean-Juste as Aristide's designate ("clone" according to one businessman), and Jean-Juste has not shied away from playing the "Titid" card with the faithful. Even those who say they are committed to moving beyond Aristide fear his reach; Gilles, for example, makes no bones about his fear for his physical safety if he is seen as "betraying" Aristide. But overall we believe Aristide's influence is waning and it is not clear he can influence events on the ground from South Africa as much as many think. Jean-Juste's relationship with Aristide was never close and he gives the distinct impression of someone looking for his own path. Typically, Aristide has not made his views on electoral participation known publicly, leaving his options open for a decision either way. Clearly his preferred outcome would be to disrupt the electoral process; second-best would be to delegitimize the process and the electoral results. However, if it appears that a successful and legitimate process is underway and cannot be stopped, participation-by-proxy may become the course he chooses, especially if he thinks a loyal Lavalas slate of candidate could win.

Comment

13. (C) It will take several months for the differing divisions and agendas within Lavalas to sort themselves out, and the results could vary widely depending on a few key variables. First and foremost is what Aristide decides to push and the degree to which he is successful. Second is what Jean-Juste does. If he holds to the hard-line and calls for a boycott, especially if he does it in the name of Aristide, then many pro-Lavalas voters will likely heed his call. If this happens in the context of credible claims of anti-Lavalas bias by election authorities and/or anti-Lavalas violence by ex-FADH or other elements, this could call into question the legitimacy of the election results. A third variable is how successful Cherestal and his group are in formulating a compelling message for former Aristide voters. (Related to this is whether corruption charges will be brought against him that could take him entirely out of the running; in the past ten days there have been murmurs in the press of a series corruption-related arrest warrants being prepared, including against Cherestal.) Finally, there is the possibility (which we cannot really judge at this point) that former Lavalas President Rene Preval could enter the fray. Preval has been out of the political scene since he left the Presidency in 2001, but of late has started meeting with some political leaders. At least a few observers believe he is interested in getting involved and many tell us he would be a more formidable Presidential candidate than either Jean-Juste or Cherestal. For what it is worth, Desgranges told us after meeting with Preval recently that Preval said he is not going to run.

14. (C) U.S. interests argue for encouraging the maximum possible voter participation and the active involvement by the full political spectrum, including the Lavalas sector. We have made clear to all factions that we will support the development of a democratic, modern Lavalas political vehicle, whatever the name, as long as there is a clear break with Aristide's legacy of violence and misrule.

FOLEY